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PUBLICATIONS
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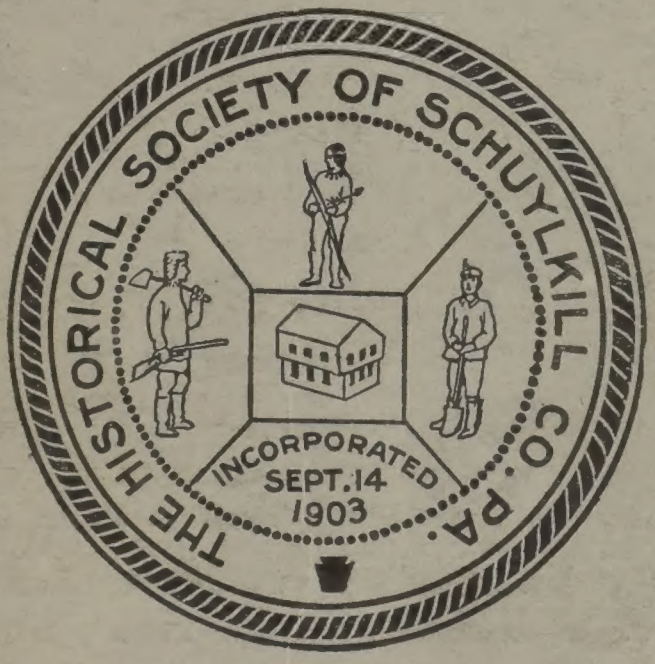
Of SCHUYLKILL COUNTY



BIOGRAPHY *of* JOS. F. PATTERSON

THE REHRER MYSTERY

By JOS. F. PATTERSON

Pottsville Journal Print
1924

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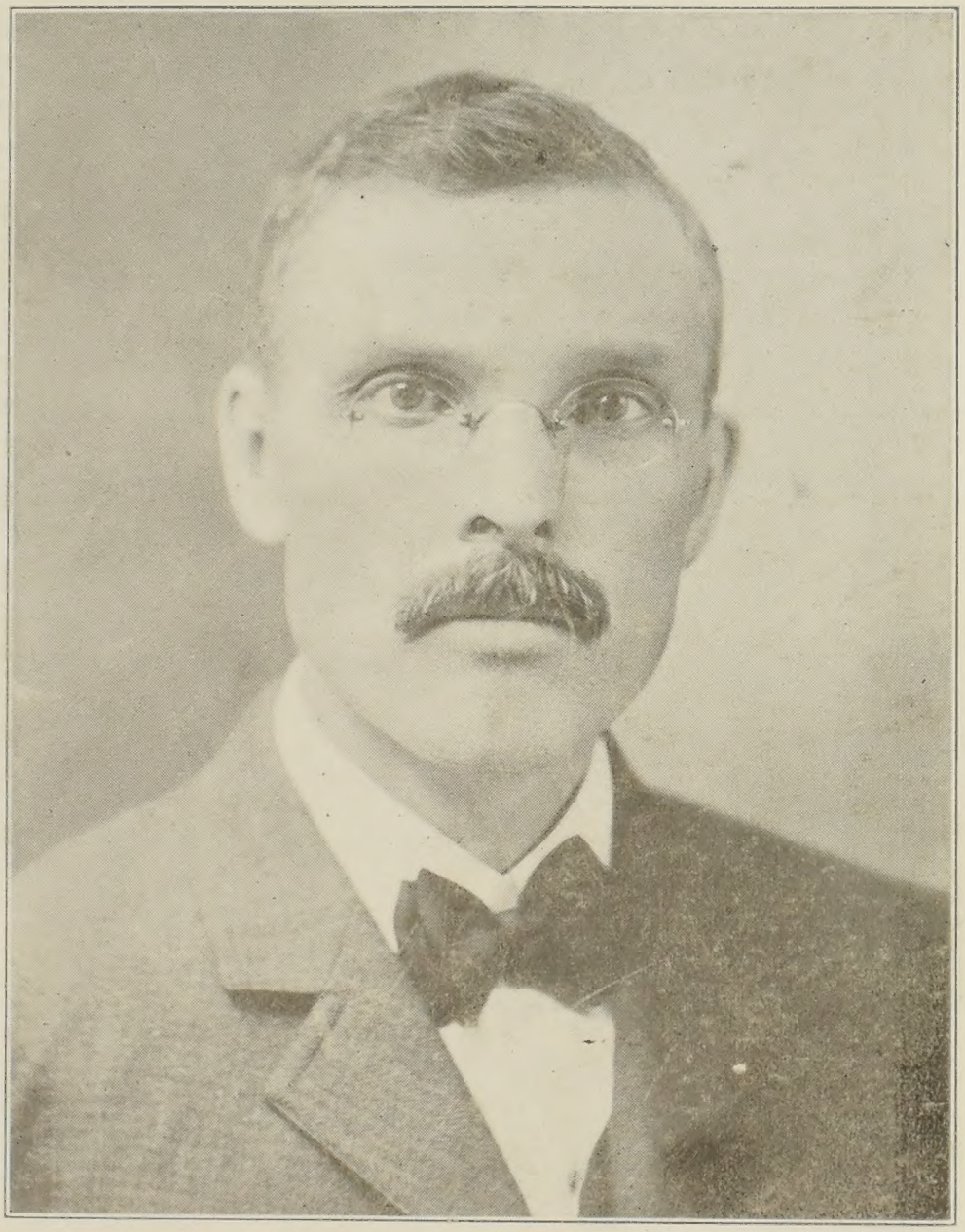

Joseph F. Patterson.

BORN
Killoe, Durham Co., England
May 8th, 1850

DIED
Pottsville, Penna.
January 5th, 1916

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JOSEPH F. PATTERSON

Delivered Before the Schuylkill County Historical Society by J. H. Filbert, Esq.

Joseph F. Patterson was born May 8, 1850, in the little mining village of Killoe, three miles inland from Hartlepool, Durhamshire, England. His parents, William and Ann Fotheringill Patterson, having died when he was three years old he was brought up by his maternal grand parents. He had been christened Joseph, but as there was another Joseph Patterson living in the village, at a later date he added his mother's family name to his christian name.

Stern necessity compelled him to enter the coal mines at the age of ten years, where he worked from four o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the evening for a mere pittance. Notwithstanding this handicap, he determined to get the very best education he could under the circumstances, and took a boyish pride in saving his pennies and buying books to improve his mind. Finally he took up a course in short hand from text-books alone, and became the proud possessor of a teacher's certificate bearing the signature of Isaac Pittman, granted him in February, 1869.

Meanwhile the great Rebellion had been going on in the United States and Schuylkill County, one of the most important centers of the anthracite coal trade, had been depleted of many of its miners by their patriotic response to their Country's call; for out of the County's population of 90,000, 13,000 had answered the summons, thus mine labor became very scarce and miners in the region were receiving a greater remuneration for their labor than at any former time.

This had induced large numbers of English and Welsh miners to emigrate to the region and among the number was a cousin of Mr. Patterson's who had settled at Tremont.

Charmed by letters he received from his cousin, setting forth the advantages of the New World, he sailed for the United States in 1869. Arriving at Pottsville one evening about dusk, he was directed to the hotel of Hannah Goff, quite an eccentric character whose hotel stood on East Norwegian Street, where the Reading Railroad Station is at present. One can imagine the delight of the home-sick English boy when she addressed him in his own north country dialect, and informed him she had known his parents in the old country, and gave him some sage, and never to be forgotten advice as to how to deport himself in his new home.

Next day he proceeded by stage to Donaldson, and worked as a miner in that vicinity until the end of 1875, participating in the several strikes that occurred during those years. He took an active part in the Miner's organization, becoming secretary during the latter months of his mining career.

In March of 1875, during the "Long Strike," he was sent to Harrisburg on business of the organization. The Legislature was in session and the contractor who published the Legislative Record, being short of help, put him to work as a short hand amenuensis. He made good during the remaining three weeks of the session, then went back to the mines until the end of the year.

At the session of the Pennsylvania Legislature of 1876 he was placed on the regular "Legislative Record" corps. The remainder of that year he was employed at Washington, D. C., by one of the House reporters on the Congressional Record, and also in Philadelphia by his original employer, a law reporter in that city.

He worked through the Legislative Session of 1877 until its adjournment about the middle of March, when he became thoroughly convinced that if he was

to follow short hand as a profession, his educational acquirements must be immediately and extensively supplemented.

He therefore went back to his mining village and set himself down to a daily routine of one hour lessons or studies in all the common-school and several of the higher branches of learning. From daylight to dark he kept this up for forty weeks. When he got stuck he got in touch with a school teacher and asked questions.

He was again employed at the Legislative Session of 1878. In September of that year he entered the employment of Chas. B. Collier, a law reporter of New York City, and for two years went into Court with him every day and took notes—a laborious but splendid apprenticeship—doing his writing out in long hand after court hours, in the evening.

In January of 1881, the President Judge of the Courts of Schuylkill County, offered him the position of Official Court Stenographer, which he accepted and filled until his death, January 5, 1916, a period of 35 years.

While Mr. Patterson began the practice of stenography long before the typewriter was thought of, and in the earlier days of his profession the reporter had to reproduce his work in long hand by pen and ink, he was one of the first to adopt the typewriter when it made its appearance and had the first one in Schuylkill County. He was also one of the first to adopt the phonograph as an aid to his profession, dictating his notes to the phonograph, and having a clerk reproduce them on the typewriter.

Such was his painstaking care and efficiency, that during all his long career as the Official Stenographer of this Judicial District, not once has a record he produced been questioned. His capacity for work was fully demonstrated in an ejectment suit, involving title to valuable anthracite coal lands, tried in 1890, when with the limited equipment of a country stenographer's office, he furnished daily copy for a continuous period of ninety-one days. In that case the

charge of the Court lasted, with a short interval for lunch, through one entire day.

During his mining experiences he suffered a very painful accident. An explosion of gas burned him so severely that he hovered between life and death for weeks. This accident, together with inhaling the dust and bad air of the mines brought on miner's asthma, with which he had been afflicted for thirty years. In fact for that period his life might be termed one long battle for breath. For weeks at a time he was unable to sleep in a recumbent position, but was forced to take his rest sitting upright in a chair. Yet no one, not even his most intimate friend, ever heard him complain. Cheerfully, courageously, manfully he bore in silence a cross of physical suffering that no one without his magnificent courage and fortitude could have borne.

He had a great love for the open air, the fields and the country roads and he was one of the first bicycle riders in this locality; had the first motorcycle and the second automobile in the county. On sultry summer days when his breathing was labored, the rush against the atmosphere seemed to force the air into his tortured lungs.

Just as in his mining days his ambition had been to ameliorate the conditions under which he and his co-workers had labored, so through his whole life, by precept and example, he strove to improve himself and his friends. By nature he was of a retiring disposition. One to become thoroughly acquainted with him had to penetrate his reserve, but to those who accomplished this there was a great store of love and loyalty and he gathered around him a coterie of friends, many of them a generation younger than he was, to whom he became an inspiration in correct thinking and proper living.

He was one of the organizers of the Mid Winter Educational Club of Pottsville, which has the proud distinction of having existed longer than any men's literary club in the County. It was organized Oct. 1, 1894, and Mr. Patterson was its President from its

inception to the day of his death. Its membership, limited to twenty-five, comprised clergymen, physicians, lawyers, bankers, teachers, etc. The President Judge of our Courts, still active in the organization, was one of its charter members. Other members have become District Attorneys, Senators and filled many positions of trust and confidence in the County.

For the first fifteen years of its existence it met in Mr. Patterson's office, and there he was the center of some of the brightest men of the community. It was in that office the Schuylkill County Historical Society had its birth. I well remember the occasion. There had been a general discussion of the early history of the County and the need of an historical society. Mr. G. A. Berner proposed that the Midwinter Educational Club should organize a County Historical Society. I objected to the "Midwinter" acting in the matter alone without consulting such men as Judge David C. Henning and the Reverend Mr. Weller of Orwigsburg, who had already done quite a little historical research work. The matter was compromised and the minutes of the meeting of Monday, April 13, 1903, contains the following:—"Motion by Mr. Berner, seconded by Mr. Filbert, that the president appoint a committee of five, with Mr. Patterson as chairman, to devise ways and means to organize an historical society for Schuylkill County, and report at the earliest date. Carried."

"The chair announced as that committee: (G. A.) Berner, (J. H.) Filbert, (D. G.) Lubold and (J. W.) Fox." At the meeting of April 27, 1903, "Mr. Lubold reported for the Committee on Historical Society, that he with Messrs. Patterson and Fox of that committee, attended a meeting held at the office of Judge Henning (No. 208 South Centre Street, Pottsville.) At that meeting a committee of three consisting of Mr. Patterson, Mr. Lubold and A. W. Schalk, Esq., was appointed to select an address to be sent to the representative men of the different towns in Schuylkill County. The Committee met at the office of Mr. Pat-

terson but adjourned to Wednesday, April 29, 1903, when an address was to be selected."

It will therefore appear that the statement in the Introduction to Volume 1, Part 1 of the Publications of the Historical Society of Schuylkill County that "the first definite steps toward forming the society were taken by a few gentlemen, who at the invitation of the Hon. D. C. Henning, met in his office in Pottsville, on the evening of April 21, 1903 and appointed a committee &c," is incorrect as the first definite step was the motion of April 13, 1903 in the Mid-winter club, and the appointment of the committee, of which Mr. Patterson was chairman, at that meeting, and it was pursuant to the call of the Patterson Committee that the meeting of April 21, was held in Judge Henning's office, and the action there taken was reported back to the parent body, the Mid-Winter Educational Club, with the information that two of its members were serving on the committee for the general call.

Not only was Mr. Patterson the Chairman of the Committee that called the Historical Society into being, but he served on its first Executive Committee, and from its very start has been connected with its governing body, served as its President for three years and contributed to it many of its most valuable papers.

Another organization Mr. Patterson took a deep interest in was the Schuylkill County Motor Club. As the Historical Society grew out of a discussion in the "Midwinter Club" of local history, so the Motor Club grew out of a discussion of the need of better roads in the same organization and was started pursuant to a call signed by Mr. Patterson, Hon. H. O. Bechtel and myself, and was organized in my office in the Morris Building, Pottsville. Its province was to endeavor to obtain better roads. When it started strangers were warned to avoid Schuylkill County on account of its miserable roads; today our highways are far superior to any of the adjoining counnties, mainly on account of this society.

Mr. Patterson took an earnest interest in all its doings and served on its Board of Governors from its start to his death.

I have dwelt on these societies longer perhaps than I should have, because he had sort of fathered them all and took such an enthusiastic interest in all their doings. So constant was his attendance at all their meetings, that if he was absent his friends would say "poor Joe, he must be worse," for they knew that he would be present unless his bodily infirmities were such that he could not drag himself there.

He was intensely social in his disposition, not only did he attend the business meetings, but lingered for social sessions after the work of the meeting was done. He was usually among the first to arrive and the last to go.

Such had been the studious habits of this self educated man, that though there was many graduates of the great universities among the members of the Educational Club, Mr. Patterson's papers outranked all for the depth of their reasoning and the beauty of their diction, and his name on the program meant a "red letter" night and a full attendance.

I think the simplest and most glowing tribute to George Washington that I have ever heard, was paid by this English born member before that society.

For several years the Motor Club published a small monthly periodical, "The Good Roads Advocate," he was a constant contributor to this—experience in the earlier days of motoring—short trips—beautiful bits of scenery he had met with and the like, always anonymous; once he essayed verse:—

"THE TOOT OF THE AUTO HORN"

"There's a sound that drives dull care away,
That disperses all our ills.
That puts new life into our veins,
Our souls with rapture fills.
We put our books back on the shelves,
On work our backs we turn.
And we cast the "white man's burden" off,
At the toot of the auto horn.

Then we hie us to the old garage,
And in a clean white shirt

We crawl beneath the blooming car,
To our neck in grease and dirt.
Washed up, we don our auto togs,
All gents to the manner born.
And folks think, "there goes a millionaire,"
As we toot our auto horn.

Way out on the pike we glide along,
Like a bird upon the wing.
We feel that life is now worth while.
We feel like a very King.
"To Hades with fret and care and toil,"
We exclaim with heartfelt scorn;
As we speed along with exulting glee,
And we toot our auto horn.

Oh! there's nothing can touch our steeds of steel,
As we travel the country round.
There can nothing give such boundless joy
In this whole wide world be found.
If we lose in the next world the things of this,
If there's one thing we'll miss and mourn
When we enter in through the pearly gates,
'Twill be the toot of the auto horn."

Modest and unassuming, his papers read before the Historical Society, on the early labor troubles, "Old W. B. A. Days" &c, show no reference to the prominent part he had taken in labor agitation; for he was a leader of the leaders. His counsel was always sought in trying moments, and was always given on the side of law and order. His last contribution to the Society "The Rehrer Mystery" is a gem. Instead of handling his matter in a dry uninteresting manner, too often the fashion of historians, he unfolds the story with a literary skill worthy the pen of a Washington Irving. The reader feels the hidden excitement of the mystery until the last sentence.

Nor were his manly qualities only appreciated at home, for the crowning honor of his long career as a shorthand reporter, was his election to the presidency of the Pennsylvania Shorthand Reporters' Association, at its annual meeting at Harrisburg, in July, 1914.

The Phonographic Magazine, published at Cincinnati, Ohio, in its issue of January, 1915, not only printed a sketch of his life, from which I have liberally quoted, but also has his picture on the cover.

Early in his career he registered as a law student,

but never applied to be admitted to practice. He was the only one, not admitted to practice before the Courts, who was ever honored with a meeting of the Bench and Bar to pass resolutions of regret at his death.

Mr. Patterson was married to Amanda Miller, of Donaldson, Nov. 28, 1872. She preceded him in death five years. Three children survive him, a son John, and two daughters: Elizabeth, married to A. Russel Smith and Alice, married to Rufus H. Dentzer.

I have never known an Englishman born and bred to become as thoroughly Americanized as was Mr. Patterson. Inside of ten years he had eliminated from his speech all trace of his broad Yorkshire dialect, no one from his conversation would have drawn the inference that he was not American born. He spoke and thought like an American, and yet on his visits back home the vernacular of his youth sounded like music to him.

On one of his trips to England, during Queen Victoria's Jubilee, he became highly indignant upon being ordered out of an English railroad station because a train bearing her grand-son, the Emperor of Germany, was due. He remonstrated on the grounds that he was an American citizen, but was told by an officer that he had better go.

Another instance of his love for the country of his adoption is told of him. During his latter years it was necessary for him to expatriate himself during the hay fever season. He usually spent the period camping on a small lake in the Canadian woods. A gentleman he met there, a member of the provincial Parliament, upon visiting his camp took umbrage because he had an American flag floating over the camp. He told him that he as an Englishman should know better than to do anything so unpatriotic. That winter his friend introduced in Parliament, and had passed, an Act making it unlawful to float a foreign flag on the soil of the Province, without the British flag displayed above it, and promptly notified Mr. Pat-

terson of the law. Next summer, on again visiting the Patterson camp, he was complacently shown a big, broad, ample, silk Stars and Stripes with a stingy little cotton British flag above it.

THE REHRER MYSTERY.

Paper Read Before The Historical Society by the Author, Joseph F. Patterson, on Nov. 3rd, 1915.

When the writer came to Schuylkill County, early in 1869, and took up his abode in the mining village of Donaldson, his horizon, visual, social and literary, became very limited. Standing on any street in the village, he could not see beyond a mile in any direction, the mountains coming close in on every side. No passenger trains reached the village. The best and only communication it had was the stage which ran daily between it and Pottsville, carrying passengers and mail. No daily newspaper entered its secluded precincts. At the tavern at which he boarded the literature which came under his notice consisted of the weekly Miners' Journal, the New York Clipper, a sporting weekly, and the New York Ledger, a weekly story paper, published by Robert Bonner. His acquaintance for quite a while did not extend beyond the township lines, and it contained about a thousand souls, more than half of whom were in the village, and the rest in three other smaller settlements. It was a coal township. There was but one farm within its boundaries. The only channel of communication between the writer and the outer world was the postal department, and that naturally brought him in contact with the post master of the only post office in the township, "Old Davy Lominson," as he was familiarly called, when people spoke of him, but, when they spoke to him, he was always "Mr. Lomison." He came there from Columbia County in 1846 and opened a coal mine. For twenty years he owned and kept a

hotel, the Franklin House, which was the largest piece of real estate, outside of the colleries, in the township. It was the first substantial stone building erected in the locality. It was large and commodious, had a big innyard, extensive shed and stable accommodations, and was the terminus of the stage line. In front of the hotel stood an immense Liberty Pole erected during the Civil War, which the villagers boasted was the finest and tallest pole in the county west of Pottsville. All political speeches by the visiting spell binders of that day were heard from its porch. In the dining room of the hotel the elections were held. In that same dining room, in the early days, before there were any churches in the township, religious services were held, on which occasions the bar room would be stripped of its furniture for the benefit of the worshippers. Some years ago a retired Methodist Episcopal Bishop preaching in the village, recalled an incident when he had held service in the hotel while the floor was still littered with chips and shavings from the tools of the workmen employed in its erection.

The postal business was attended to at a standing desk, about 20 by 30 inches square and nine inches deep, which occupied a corner of the bar room. When the one daily mail came in by stage between five and six o'clock in the evening, the post master would leisurely empty the bag, sort its contents, and, after having them arranged in order, and cautioning the crowd of males by that time assembled in the bar room to be quiet, he would solemnly call off the name on each piece, and if the person to whom the mail was addressed, or any friend wanted to receive it, he answered "Here" and it was handed to him. The women usually assembled in the yard near the open window at which he stood and the mail was passed out to them when claimed. To mail a letter you dropped it into the desk through a crack; and if you had not a stamp to affix, you dropped the three cents in with the letter. Sometimes people forgot to drop the pennies, and when several letters were found by

him and the money was one or two letters short, the old gentleman did not know which patron had been remiss, but he stamped and sent them all off anyhow. Indeed I heard some of the young fellows whisper, that they had put old, used stamps on letters; but everything went. The post master was too much of a benevolent despot to let a little thing like that interfere with the free and untrammeled passage of Uncle Sam's mail.

A description of this particular unit of the United States postal department would not be complete, unless reference was made to Old Bill Heffner, a quaint character, who for many years drove the aforementioned stage. Large, portly, slow, but punctual, encumbered in winter time with much clothing, he reminded one of Dicken's delineation of the elder Weller. He knew, and was known by, everybody along the line, and carried parcels and messages to and fro; and although he could neither read or write, he would carry dozens of packages on a single trip, receive and deliver them safely, and never make a mistake. Bill was the first citizen of the west end of the county that the writer encountered, having made his advent to that section by stage from Pottsville, and remembers well how he sat quietly in the back of the stage and listened to Bill's quaint conversation with, and remarks and observations made to, the other passengers, all of whom seemed, to the writer, to be old and particular friends of the old stage driver.

Now, while the post office business was conducted in a bar room, the reader of this sketch must not misinterpret that fact. The room had a licensed bar, but it was not a drinking place. You could go there a hundred times and not see a man take a drink. The room was used as a kind of club room or meeting place by the men of the neighborhood. During the strikes and the idle time in winter months, many of the miners of the village would spend the whole day there, going home only for meals. They sat around on benches and chairs, smoking and chatting. If anything out of the ordinary occurred in the village, it

was discussed there. There the wits held high court. Practical jokers played tricks on their unsuspecting victims. On one occasion, just as the writer happened in, there was a sudden flash in the face of an occupant of a bench. Somebody had filled the man's pipe and put gun powder in it, enough to blow the head off the pipe. There was a large hotel register with printed head lines kept on the desk. I do not recall that I ever saw the name of a guest registered on it, but its pages were filled with the oddest entries imaginable, of supposed meetings presided over by the village wits, and the proceedings had and motions and resolutions adopted were entered in solemn and ceremonious style.

One of the vehicles of amusement that flourished there was known as the Klu Klux Klan, a psuedo lodge—so named after the lawless organization in vogue in the states of the South in the days of Reconstruction. The oldest inhabitant of the village presided over its functions. He was a retired farmer miner, who, in wit and repartee, was easily capable of holding his own against the entire village combined. Individually and collectively they were always trying to put one over on the "old Dutchman," but they seldom scored. They had initiation whenever they could secure a man reckless enough of his personal dignity, and bones, to become a candidate. An athletic young Irishman was the substitute for the goat, and the antics of a real goat were tame in comparison with those that he would pull off during the fantastic ceremony. If the actual initiation lacked brilliancy in performance, it was more than made up for when the secretary, a bright young Welshman, who afterwards became a school principal, came to enter the proceedings in the hotel register.

Mr. Lomison dominated the school board. It was at his house the county superintendent put up when he came around on his annual examination of teachers. It was the only house in the township that could boast the possession of a piano, and, above all it was the only household that had sent its children out of

town to be educated at more advanced institutions than the village afforded. Tall of form, with thin, spare features, Mr. Lomison usually dressed during the warm weather in linen pantaloons, a thin alpaca coat, an old battered straw hat, white home-laundered shirt, with collar attached, turned down over a silk kerchief. He was neat and tidy in appearance, stately in his gait, a gentleman of the old school. He was courteous and obliging to everybody, but he had no confidants. He kept himself aloof from every man. No one would dare to be familiar in addressing him. He was far and away the most striking character in the township. I had known him but a short time when I learned there was an intensely interesting story connected with him that was county history; that he had been in the limelight; had been the centre of a scathing, bitter controversy and investigation, had been suspected, arrested and thrown into prison under a horrible charge, brought out of the cell into court by a writ of Habeas Corpus, and then—but that is anticipating, for what I have said is merely introductory to a recital of the facts attending the mysterious disappearance of Captain E. Godfrey Rehrer, which event was for many months the one absorbing topic discussed at the fireside and at the public gatherings by practically everybody living in the valley between the Sharp and Broad Mountains in the southern anthracite coal field, from Tamaqua to Tremont.

E. Godfrey Rehrer, a citizen of Tamaqua, during the war of the Rebellion entered and became an officer of the Engineers Corps of the army of the United States, and after years of faithful service, was honorably discharged, and again settled down in Tamaqua to the quiet pursuits of civil life. Subsequently he engaged as superintendent of the Tremont Coal Company which had a mining operation at Donaldson. The Captain moved with his family to Tremont, which was about a mile distant from the operation. While acting as superintendent he discovered a vein of coal which had never before been developed in that section, and, having obtained a lease from the Tremont Coal

Company, he commenced driving a tunnel to reach it. He expended several thousand dollars on the tunnel, but, afterwards, having formed a partnership with two citizens of Tamaqua and one living in the neighborhood of the colliery for the further prosecution of the work, his partners objected to the tunnel project, work on it was stopped and they began the sinking of a slope instead. This was progressing favorably. Every thing was proceeding, apparently smoothly and satisfactorily, when the partners met in the office of the company, situated near the colliery, on Thursday evening the 14th of November, 1867, for the purpose of arranging for the paying of their workmen on the Saturday following. Before they separated for the night Captain Rehrer informed his partners that he would go next morning to the works at Donaldson and from there by stage to Pottsville.

On Friday morning, the 15th, Capt. Rehrer rose very early, ate breakfast and started to walk to Donaldson. About a half mile from his house he was passed by John Kopp, a miner employed at Eckert's mines, a mile beyond Donaldson, who was on his way to work. They were acquainted and Mr. Kopp bade him "good morning" and passed on. This was at six o'clock. Mr. Kopp, after walking a short distance farther, went from the team road to the railroad, his usual route in going to and coming from work, and, as he did so, he looked back and saw Capt. Rehrer still coming on. That was the last glimpse any person in Schuylkill County ever had of Capt. Rehrer. From that moment no trace of him was discoverable. For some days no uneasiness was felt by his family and friends. It was supposed that business had suddenly called him from the county. When a week had elapsed and still no tidings from him, his friends became alarmed and active inquiry was started. His father, employed in Harrisburg, was communicated with, and came to the County, but could give no information. Capt. Rehrer's father-in-law, Mr. Roland Jones, of Tamaqua, was found to be equally ignorant of his whereabouts. The telegraph wires were kept busy with inquiries and

answers, but nowhere could it be ascertained that Capt. Rehrer had been seen after six o'clock on that fateful morning. His domestic relations were happy; his business seemed to promise well; there was no known or conceivable cause why the man should absent himself in a clandestine manner. The citizens of Tremont and Donaldson were thrown into a state of tremendous excitement, for Capt. Rehrer was well and favorably known amongst them, and he held a splendid record as a soldier. The citizens turned out by the hundreds, and for days searched the mountains, the ravines, the streams and crop-falls, in the expectation of finding his dead body, but without result. Marshall Heisler brought a body of his well trained force, "the Snapper Police" to the locality, and they with all their accumulated experience could not solve the problem. The office safe was forced and the papers contained therein examined. Everything was found to be right, but nothing learned that would throw any light on the mystery. A coat, a hat, and a pair of pantaloons found in a book case in the office were identified as those actually worn by Capt. Rehrer when he set forth on that morning to visit the mine. This find, instead of illuminating, deepened the darkness of the mystery which surrounded the disappearance, and strongly suggested foul play, and that by someone closely connected with him in a business capacity. Other facts, it was said, discovered, but not revealed to the public, seemed to point unmistakably the same way. A reward of $500 was offered by the authorities, $250 for the discovery of the body, and a like sum for the apprehension of the perpetrator of the deed, for his friends and the community in general had reluctantly settled down to the conclusion that he had been foully murdered. A fraternal lodge in Tamaqua, to which Rehrer belonged, added an additional $100 to the proffered reward.

It seems rather strange to us at this day to learn that people of liberal education and high business and social standing in the county interested in the search consulted professional fortune-tellers and spiritualistic

mediums in this and neighboring communities, and that many mysterious hints given out from these sources were followed up with much earnestness of purpose and hope of success; but it is needless to say that the craftily worded revelations derived from these pretended clairvoyants brought the searchers no nearer to the remains of the missing captain than the suggestions and hints of less pretentious and more disinterested volunteers.

The office of the company was on Mr. Lomison's hotel property, within a few hundred feet of the mine, and Rehrer, from the point he was last seen alive, would have to pass within a few feet of the hotel, on his way to the mine, his declared destination that morning. Many circumstances pointed to Mr. Lomison as the party most likely to do his partner harm and the one that apparently had had the opportunity to carry out such purpose. The more strongly Mr. Lomison asserted and reiterated his belief that Rehrer was alive, the more it was taken as convincing proof that he was guilty of his damnable taking off.

One of the hints given by a fortune-teller was that blood would be found on the clothing of the man who committed the deed. Blood was actually found on the clothing of Mr. Lomison, which fact he endeavored to explain by asserting it had gotten there while killing a chicken for the hotel table.

A woman addicted to her cups, who lived near the mine, told a wierd story of what she had seen transpiring in the dead of the night at the boiler fires, and it was at once concluded that the body of the murdered engineer had been disposed of by burning it in that relentless fashion. The ashes under the boiler and the soot accumulated in the stack of the boiler house were carefully collected and thoroughly sifted in an endeavor to find some relic or remains of bone or button or something that would furnish a clue.

Mr. Lomison had recently married a lady who had kept house for him after the death of his first wife, and the gossiping traducers at once jumped to

the conclusion that she knew more about the murder of Rehrer than was safe for him, and that he had married her to keep her mouth shut. The hotel premises were thoroughly and minutely searched, and even the bake oven investigated, to find out whether the body had been cremated on its ample hearth. Iron rods were driven into the coal banks at innumerable places in the neighborhood, and smelled at when extracted, in the hope of thus finding the decomposing body.

The dark corners on the streets, the lonely roads and forest paths, the old abandoned slopes and drifts of the neighborhood, all became, in imagination haunted; timid maidens nestled closer to their escorts in evening rambles; children were hushed, and restless boys kept indoors at night by the mother's whisper that "Rehrer's ghost" might get them if they did not do as they were told.

An abandoned slope at Marshfield, one mile to the east of Donaldson, had become filled with water, but it was deemed a most likely place to hide the crime, for one of the fortune-tellers had told them that the murderer had buried the remains deep down in the earth. A pump was installed and the process of emptying the mine, 225 feet in depth, started. The pump did not do the work fast enough and another and larger one was procured. The owner of the latter, however, demanded a recompense for the use of it too large for the parties prosecuting the search, more than they could afford, and the undertaking was ordered to be abandoned. While hoisting the pump, the rope broke and the pump dropped back into the water and is still buried in the mine. Rehrer's heartbroken wife, after months of anguish and distress and waiting, put on the customary badges of mourning, relinquishing all hope of ever seeing him alive, disposed of her household effects and went with her children back to Tamaqua to live with her father.

Matters were further complicated by the appearance upon the scene of an alleged detective from Buffalo. After interviews with some of the suspected

parties he suddenly disappeared from the county. A letter having been misdirected found its way to the dead letter office in Washington, D. C. and on being opened was found to contain information which, on being laid before Governor Geary, was deemed sufficient to warrant the issuance of requisition papers for the arrest of several men in Buffalo. The letter was claimed to have been written by Thomas Smith, of Tamaqua, one of the partners of Capt. Rehrer. In consequence of the information thus derived, on January 22nd, 1868, Mr. David Lomison of Donaldson, and on January 23rd, Mr. Thomas Smith and John Albrighton, Jr., of Tamaqua, were arrested by Marshal Heisler's police, and, after hearings before Squire Frailey of Pottsville and Squire Graeff of Tamaqua, were committed to the Schuylkill County prison, charged with the murder of Capt. Rehrer. A writ of habeas corpus was sued out by Jonathan Wright, Esq., who had formerly been a school teacher in the West End, an old friend of Mr. Lomison. At the moment of the arrest public feeling ran high, and there was talk of lynching Mr. Lomison, but a few friends, who still believed in his integrity as a man, gathered around him and frustrated the accomplishment of any purpose of that kind, if it had been at all seriously contemplated. He was generally looked upon as the man thorough investigation would show had committed the deed.

At the habeas corpus hearing before Judge James Ryon quite a strong case was made by the commonwealth, based altogether on circumstantial evidence. On the night before the disappearance, when the partners met in the office at Donaldson, there had been altercation and angry words between them, loud enough to attract attention and be noticed by the people on the outside, and the language used bordered on threats, so that a possible motive was apparently established for the commission of a crime. The blood on the clothing of Mr. Lomison, and the discovery of the clothing worn by the missing man when he left his home that morning, found within a

few feet of Mr. Lomison's hotel, were regarded as highly important; in addition to all the suspicious circumstances there was added the revelations of a detective, who had as he claimed interviewed the parties implicated and wormed from them damaging admissions of guilt. The one missing link in the chain was the lack of proof of the corpus delicti, for no one could swear that the Captain was dead. But so formidable were the cumulative suspicious circumstances that eminent counsel for the commonwealth declared that if they could find a piece of the body of Rehrer, if it were only a bone an inch long, Mr. Lomison would hang. Under existing circumstances there was nothing to be done except dismiss the cases for want of sufficient evidence, and the prisoners were discharged on the 3rd of February, 1868. On the 13th of June, in the same year the court directed the district attorney, James Ellis, Esq., to enter nolle prosequis and that was accordingly done.

The case was a most unique one and attracted wide attention, being discussed by the newspapers throughout the commonwealth. After the parties under suspicion had been liberated, civil suits for damages were instituted by them against Mr. Roland Jones, at whose instance the arrests were made, and against the police officers who executed the warrants, and the detective who had figured in the alleged revelations. The detective seems to have had poetical justice meeted out to him. On the day the prisoners were released he was committed to prison, Feb. 3, 1868, where he languished, apparently without money or friends, until August 29, 1868, a period of seven months. I find a minute in the court records to the effect that C. C. Carpenter, a prisoner confined in the Schuylkill County prison, prays the court for aid in procuring witnesses in his behalf, and that they be subpoenaed at the expense of the county. And the court so directed. One of the victims under oath denied that he had ever made any revelations to him, such as had appeared in the newspapers; and another one, also under oath, declared the detective had made false

and malicious statements to him with the purpose of extracting big money from him and others.

In September, 1868, a boy picking coal at a bank near Tremont became curious as to what might be seen in the old abandoned drift from which the refuse had been mined. He started out on an exploring expedition, which was suddenly terminated by his discovery of a number of the larger bones of a human body right in the very entrance to the drift. He hastily communicated his find to Squire I. P. Bechtel of Tremont. The squire took charge of the remains and proceeded further into the mine to secure the balance of the bones required to make up a human skeleton, but no more were found. The appearance of the remains suggested age, but having been subjected to the action of the sulphur water of the mine, nobody could tell how many years previously or how recently they had been clothed with living flesh. The squire, being also a deputy coroner, promptly summoned a jury, and they solemnly sat on the discovery, and after full and deliberate investigations brought forth this verdict: "That the bones are the remains of a dead body found upwards of thirty years since, at or near Coal Creek (now Frailey Township), Schuylkill County, then, as yet unknown which, after being buried at that time were exhumed, and the skeleton put up by a physician, not now, but then a resident of Tremont and upon said physician's removing from Tremont, was left in the hands of other parties, where the same was kept until about the 25th of May, 1868, when from age and dilapidation, it became obnoxious, and was placed in charge of two persons to put out, who placed the same in the very unsuitable place of an abandoned coal tunnel known as "Laux's Tunnel," where the same was now found and first supposed to be the remains of some person recently missing." The community had hoped and believed this discovery would clear up the Rehrer mystery, but the facts elicitated at the inquest left them no nearer a solution of the problem than they were before.

A year and a half after the opening events of this

story, on the 4th of March, 1869, the day when the term of Andrew Johnson, as President of the United States expired, and the renowned leader of the Union Army, U. S. Grant, was to be inducted into that responsible office, with a great and befitting military display, Mr. George W. Cole, a mine owner of Tamaqua, who had journeyed to Washington, D. C., to view the interesting ceremony, stood on the sidewalk of that city, near the northwest corner of the Capitol grounds, with thousands of others, leisurely watching the various military organizations take up their assigned positions in order to participate in the Inaugural Parade. Now, to the casual looker-on, the several units of a large body of uniformed men appear very much alike. The observant eye of Mr. Cole, was, somehow, attracted to a member of the Marine Corps who wore the chevron of a sergeant. That man, thought Mr. Cole resembles somebody I know. Why, he looks like E. Godfrey Rehrer. By heavens it is Rehrer. Moved to righteous indignation by the recollection of the deserted, grief stricken wife and children, the long and costly but fruitless search prosecuted by friends and relatives, the many humiliations and indignities heaped on his fellow-townsmen and other citizens of the county Mr. Cole, utterly forgetful of the anticipated pleasures of his trip to Washington, rushed forward, seized the man by the collar and vehemently accused him of being the missing Rehrer. The man stoutly denied it. But Mr. Cole was now positive and insistent, and finally the man admitted that he was the long lost citizen. Mr. Cole demanded of the commissioned officer in command that he be allowed to take Rehrer from the ranks of the parade for the purpose of an interview in order to clear up an important mystery. The officer, after some earnest words of explanation, judging rightly that Mr. Cole was a substantial, responsible, reputable citizen and a gentleman, and that the matter was urgent and serious, consented. Mr. Cole took Rehrer to his private room in the hotel nearby, and there elicitated from him, and reduced to writing, properly signed, so that there

should be no further question or doubt, the reasons for the method of his strange disappearance. There Rehrer laid bare the cause of his mysterious actions, explaining that, because of the expenditures necessarily involved in the opening of the colliery at Donaldson, he had become heavily indebted to his father, to his father-in-law, and several other parties; that he could discern no prospect of extricating himself from his pecuniary liabilities; that this so preyed on his mind that he resolved to abscond; that he entered the woods shortly after John Kopp had bade him "good morning" on that fateful 15th of November, 1867, crossed the Broad and Mahantongo Mountains to the north, and proceeded by obscure paths and roads to Treverton, Northumberland County; that there he worked as a day laborer for sometime; that he then went to Baltimore and worked there in the same capacity; that, having caught sight of a citizen of Schuylkill County upon the streets of Baltimore one day he was seized with the fear of discovery, and suddenly decamped, not even waiting to draw the wages due him; that he went to Philadelphia and there enlisted in the Marine Corps, expecting that he would be sent to a distant foreign station, where he would be far away from all danger of recognition and discovery; that instead of that event coming about, his battalion was ordered to Washington and had been stationed there until that eventful Fourth of March when the great mystery that had puzzled the citizens of old Schuylkill for seventeen long months was at once and forever cleared up, and the good reputation of several of its citizens again restored, although the financial losses entailed on them could not be recovered, for Mr. Lomison had been financially bankrupted, and the force of an adverse public opinion had driven Mr. Smith and Mr. Albrighton, his other partners, out of the county.

It may be mentioned, incidentally, that when Governor Geary was pressed by influential citizens to come to the aid of the local authorities by offering a large reward for the unraveling of the mystery, he

expressed himself as ready and willing to do so, were it not for the fact that from all the circumstances laid before him he had inevitably come to the conclusion that Capt. Rehrer was still alive, and therefore, he could not conscientiously act on the opposite theory. The sequel proved that the old Governor's conclusion from all the facts deduced was correct.

This is the story, gathered from the newspaper press of that time, from court and prison records, and from interviews with many citizens who participated in the events, and knew all the parties involved, facts gradually accumulated during the 45 years that have since intervened; the story of the seemingly tragic disappearance, and the somewhat melodramatic reappearance (though we trace him for but one single hour) of Capt. Rehrer.

A lady and gentleman had entered and taken seats in the front row. No one present knew who they were. When the reading was finished the gentleman arose and said that it happened that he and his wife were visiting in Pottsville and he saw in the evening paper that there was to be a lecture on the Rehrer mystery, and said he, "I came here, not knowing whether I had any right to be here or not, and even now I do not know that I have any right to speak." Being invited to proceed the speaker continued. "I knew Captain Rehrer, I met him personally; I know that this story is true." A member present suggested that the gentleman inform the audience as to who he was and where from so as to give them an idea as to what opportunities he had of knowing the story. He said, "My name is Tiley. I live in Tamaqua. I am somewhat connected with the family of Rowland Jones, in fact I was named for him. I have listened to the story with a great deal of interest, and if I were to tell it, it would be in about the very words used by the gentleman tonight, but I had heard so much of it that possibly my story might be a little longer than his." He said that Rowland Jones was worth a hundred thousand dollars, that he had spent so much in the search for Rehrer that he became poor; that he

went in the undertaking business and did not succeed, that afterwards when Rehrer settled down in the south, Florida or New Orleans I think he said, Mr. Rowland Jones went down there to live with him, and that he had to for he became very poor. Mr. Tiley said he had seen Rehrer in Tamaqua personally when he came there to take his family south. That he also knew the Smiths and Albrightons of Tamaqua. He said when Smith was arrested the officer who arrested him was a close acquaintance, and he said to Smith, "Now, Tom, you and I went to school together. I have to do this. I want you to confess the whole thing to me."

So it seems that Rehrer did come back to the county. Tiley said that Rowland Jones ought to have gotten a good gun and gone after Rehrer with it; that Rehrer said that he had been in receipt of newspapers daily (I think he said. Were there any daily newspapers published in the county at that time?) and knew every move that was made in search of him, but he did not want to take any hand in it at all, just left it go on. Also that Capt. Rehrer went to the office that morning and changed his clothes from his shifting clothes to his working clothes and went off in that garb, because people might know him in his shifting clothes while they would not in the others. Mrs. Tiley said she remembered well Mr. Rehrer coming back to Tamaqua with her family, and that she, the lady, went to school with one of Rehrer's daughters.